

# Union of Christ

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***"I in them and Thou in Me." (John 17:23)***

The mercy of God in giving to any wretch lost in sin a good hope through grace can never be sufficiently extolled. That the Holy Ghost should ever have looked upon any of us, conveyed to us divine life, brought us into concern about God. His greatness, majesty, holiness, and glory, justice, and faithfulness; into exercise about ourselves, our sin, our unfitness to stand before so holy and glorious a Being; and then have given to us a view of Christ and raised a hope in our hearts that He conquered for us, and we may come to Him - I say, that ever the Holy Ghost should have done this to any of us calls for endless praises. We can never rise to the height of our eternal obligations to the glorious God for His goodness to us, and shall never be able sufficiently here to express the thankfulness of our hearts for the little we know, it is a little: "We know in part." O but what a mercy to know a little! There is an infinitude beyond all that we know, and God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." We may ask much and think more, but both asking and thinking are exceeded infinitely by the ability of God, which means by His fullness, and willingness, and kindness to bestow blessings on His people. And you remember that Scripture in the Corinthians: "*That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,*" (1 Cor. 2:9) that seek His grace and favour.

Beloved friends, we must eternally be in debt, but the debt is such as to beget in all who are in it gratitude. Newton has the feeling beautifully expressed: "Yet would I glory in the thought that I shall owe Thee most;" and doubtless every poor sinner who feels God's goodness feels that He is the chief of sinners and owes most of all to God. It is a great thing to breathe after God, and where destitution really is (and where is it not known in the church of Christ?) it is a great thing to feel it and to confess it. O to be honest in respect of our experience is a very great matter! To have some experience of the excellences of Christ is a great matter. Paul speaks of it. It was so in him as to produce real self-denial: "*I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*" (Phil. 3:8)

Now when we, as is the case with some of us, get a glimpse of the excellency and the goodness and the glory of Christ, has not that sight just the same effect in the measure in which we get it upon our own souls? Tinsel, gaudy toys, an alluring world, a heart bent upon, those things which are death - these go, do they not? One moment's viewing of Christ will produce that effect, and yet when you have done and said all with respect to how far you have come, however far that may be, in the knowledge of Christ there is this to be said - there is an infinitude beyond it; and much of that is expressed in the text in the first word: "I in them." You may feel alone sometimes, feel that the Lord and you are very much estranged; that He has something against

you; that you have vexed and grieved His Holy Spirit; that what Scriptures you feel are Scriptures that reprove you, and you know what a poor wretch and backslider you are; tell you again and again of your faults and failings; and that experience is very wholesome, but very painful. He who does not know what he is, does not know what Christ is. But to be reproved for your sins is very painful, and if you take notice in the light and teaching of the Spirit of how Christ speaks to those churches in Asia, some of which were very, very much fallen away from Himself, you will perhaps see a good deal of your own heart and ways there. Well, when this is the case, for God the Holy Ghost to show that there is that to be attained to, will draw the soul out when He shows a word like this: "I in them." You look at yourself and say, "I am empty of Him for the most part. Union with Christ as here set forth I scarcely know," may be your complaint. What then? Why, the Holy Ghost who shows you both your deficiency and Christ's glory in the union He has with His people, will draw you out for the experience of that union: "I in them."

*"Know ye not,"* asks the apostle, *"that ye are the temple of God and that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your Own?"* Do you not know that God has come? Do you not know what it is for Him to enter His temple, and even though He comes (and He will always do it when it is necessary) with a scourge of small cords to overturn the tables of the money-changers and cast out all that merchandise that so defiles His temple - I say that though He so comes, do not you know what His coming is? If He comes you may not know exactly how, but you will certainly know the effect of His coming, and you will then be able to say, "He has come." You can tell what effect the fire has upon the water when it makes it boil, and when your hearts are affected by the Lord, when you perceive that there is a warming of your affections, a gathering of your thoughts, a fixing of your attention, a drawing out of your faith, a quickening of your love, and a brightening of your hope, and a making of Christ more precious, then you say, "Why, the Lord has come, done me good, once more visited me."

The union that subsists between Christ and His people is very wonderful, and it may be spoken of in several ways. I will, if enabled, mention a few of those ways in which this union is set forth in the Word of God, and is made known in the experience of all the saints. I may not be able to speak very long because of rather a troublesome cold which rather unfits one for being out, but as the Lord may help I will speak a little, and the first is that covenant union that there is between Christ and the church. A covenant union which is set forth in that Psalm which I was reading, the 89th: *"I have made a covenant with My chosen, with David, and his seed will I establish for ever."* It is a wonderful thing that the Lord has been pleased to set forth the union that is between Christ and His people in that covenant. The federal union is one blessed doctrine that runs through the whole of the Scriptures when Christ and the church are mentioned. They are one in the covenant, so one that you can never separate them, never dissolve the union. God has said, *"This covenant is established for ever,"* and He will not alter the thing that has gone out of His mouth; and when this becomes an experience it is wonderful. Take for instance that which is set forth in the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter had let down to him in a vision a great sheet knit at the four corners, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air; unclean things were in the sheet. Thrice the Lord said to Peter, *"Kill and eat"*, and Peter was for the moment disgusted, stood aghast as it were in his vision, at being told to eat anything that was unclean, and he protested against it. *"Lord,"* he said, *"nothing unclean has ever entered*

*my mouth.*" But God taught him something then: "*What God has cleansed, that call not thou common.*"

Now here, dear friends, is that which I would set before you - the great sheet, representing the covenant containing unclean things. Did you ever hope that you were at least one of the creeping things, but in that sheet, in that covenant? That God notwithstanding all your sin and uncleanness had put you into that great and unbreakable covenant of grace which is there represented? Now this is being in the Lord. Men die in the Lord, but they are first in Him, they live in Him. It is in the covenant that God has secured all His children beyond all trouble, all danger, all contingencies, all probabilities. Nothing of the kind enters into the covenant of grace. "*I have sworn to David My servant, I have established his throne*". And you remember in the Acts it is said, quoting this: "*This is the throne,*" David;  $\frac{1}{2}$ s Lord is on the throne, Jesus Christ is on the throne of David His father; and when He comes into the heart of a child of God, then there is some opening of the covenant which is ordered in all things and sure. "Come saints and sing with one accord, this covenant made with David;  $\frac{1}{2}$ s Lord," made on behalf of the church, made sure on their behalf, that they really are united to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Head in that ever-blessed covenant. We fall. O yes, some of us know it! We do fall, we fall from grace in the exercise of it, we fall from our steadfastness, we fall from viewing the Lord steadfastly, we fall from the exercise of faith and prayer, we fall into bondage and darkness, confusion often, we are enticed; and that brings the rod that is in the Covenant. But there is one path never, never to be known by one who is bound up in this bundle of life, and that is a fall into eternal death. The second death has no power over the child of God, it never can enter. In the 91st Psalm you read that the plague and pestilence and arrow cannot enter into the habitation of the child of God. What is his habitation? Jesus Christ manifested in the covenant of grace. It cannot be taken literally, nor even of the national covenant; it must have reference to that "secret place of the Most High, that shadow of the Almighty," spoken of in the first verse of that Psalm. This is the dwelling, the habitation, that can have no death enter into it. What a mercy to be there! Did you ever feel secure, ever feel shut in, ever realize that the Lord had shut you in that covenant which He has ordered on your behalf, in all things and sure? Blessed be God, this is one of those ways in which there is Christ in the sinner, and the sinner in Christ: "I in them."

And the second way I would speak of as to this union is, that it is union of life, a lifelong union because it is a union of life. "*I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish.*" (John 10:28) "*This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son.*" (1 John 5:11) If then you have this eternal life you have union with Christ. It is not another life different from the one He has, it is Himself. "*I am the life,*" is His own word. "I am the life of this people." He is in them in His life, spiritual life, spiritual union, oneness with Christ. O to have this is a blessing! This is the beginning of real likeness to Christ. The completeness of that likeness will be in eternity, but the beginning of it is here when the Holy Spirit conveys to an elect person this eternal life which is in Jesus Christ. "*If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.*" (2 Cor. 5:17) This is the hidden man of the heart, a new creature. And if a man is in Christ, it is because Christ is in him, not otherwise. "I in them," means that He puts His divine life into their souls. "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly," and this puts all the beauty on the church that God admires and loves and praises. If you turn at your leisure to the 21st chapter of Revelation, you will see there how God is in the church and in every individual member of it. Said the apostle, "*I saw the holy city, new*

*Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.*" Poor sinner, you may see none of this glory in yourself. You may mourn your deformity and wickedness and pollution. You may feel that all you can say is you bear the image of the earthy, which is death, deformity; but God sees this beauty. He takes a view of the entire church and shows John this church coming out of heaven having the glory of God, which is what God communicates. Jesus gives it: *"The glory Thou gavest Me I have given them."* And in that chapter this glory seems to be expressed and described in the form and the building and the materials of the holy city, new Jerusalem. Her foundations, her walls, her streets, her gates, her purity, her safety, these are set forth in that wonderful chapter. Jerusalem, the holy city, coming out of heaven from God, which shows the origin of true religion, the beauty of divine grace, and the safety of all who are bound up in the bundle of life. This is being in Christ and Christ in a sinner, a living union. Abiding in Him comes from His coming into the soul, having God's glory. The new life, the divine life that is imparted in regeneration, has that beauty in it that God prizes; nothing defiling, is here. We are defiled, but defilement does not touch this life. And to speak again of the way the Scripture puts it, you have the river, the mighty water that came issuing from beneath the threshold of the gate that looked eastward; and so far from its gathering defilement, it removed it, it takes it away; it healed whatsoever it touched and made to live whatsoever it touched; and is not this that which the people of God find in their own souls? This life when it flows to you and touches you, it heals you, heals you of all the sickness of your soul, takes away the defilement of your conscience, brings you to be as before the Lord exercised toward Him. The soul's exercise is Godward, the face is Godward, the feelings are Godward. "I in them," in that blessed, that divine life which the Lord gives: *"I give unto My sheep eternal life."* This is the secret of all the separation that takes place between the church and the world. You come out as sweetly compelled by the possession, and the exercise in you, of this life. By the motion of it you are carried Godward and away from the world. Nothing puts the world out like this. Nothing makes the world appear in its own colours so much as this. Nothing shows you that the world lieth in wickedness so much as this - the blessed life of Christ in the soul: "I in them." And from this there is no separation: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* Nothing can. *"Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or peril, or nakedness, or sword?"* "No", says the apostle, *"in all these things we are more than conquerors, for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."* (Rom. 8:35-39) What a union this is!

Now there is another thing I would name as an important point. It is this, that Christ is in His children by the efficacy of His atonement that reconciles them to God, takes all bars and hindrances between God and their souls away, sets before them an open door which no man can shut, gives them liberty to enter into the holiest of all; that removes pollution from their affections and guilt from their consciences; and if you have this, Christ is in you in the efficacy of His divine work of atonement. The Man Christ Jesus put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and in that way, whenever that blood is brought near, there is Jesus Christ. In the Hebrews the Apostle Paul brings this out. He says, to extol the precious blood of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ: *"If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!"* (Heb. 9:13,14) O the efficacy of the blood of Christ! And where this is,

is God far away? Is Christ absent from a sinner whose conscience is purged from dead works? No. "I in them." In them in this My reconciling atonement, in the efficacy of My one offering of Myself to God without spot. God there the Judge of all, God claiming satisfaction, His Son rendering that satisfaction being the Priest, offering unto God Himself, giving Himself a sacrifice for His people; and this the sinner's conscience is to realize. Conscience is God's blessed work as it is quickened, and it stands on His side so to speak, takes care of His interests. In the sinner's heart there is this feeling - God is holy, God is right, and your conscience enlightened and quickened will never consent to anything that does not honour God.

Now my friends, when this conscience, so tender for God, so honest to you, protests against your sinfulness and protests that God must be satisfied or you must sink to hell, this conscience, I say, receives perfect satisfaction. And you will remember how in the Epistle to the Corinthians the apostle sets forth the insufficiency of all the perpetually repeated sacrifices to remove sin or to pacify the conscience, If those sacrifices, said the apostle, could have removed sin, then there would have been no more conscience of sins. The people's consciences would have been so purged that they would have said, "Now no other sacrifice is necessary; what ever fresh defilements come, this sacrifice is enough". Then said the apostle: "If this sacrifice could purify, according to God's ordinance, the flesh so as to remove the disability of a Jew who had defiled himself from entering into the temple, how much more, how infinitely above this rises the atonement! How marvellous is its effect in them, it satisfies God. How wonderful is its effect in the law, it pleases the law. Now that efficacy, which in the first instance terminated in God, comes to terminate in the conscience. *"How much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."* And in this way Christ is in His people in the divine efficacy of His work in the real removal of sin, because God by that work is infinitely satisfied and pleased. O my friends, what a blessing this is! If your consciences are not eased, being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, here is that which will purge them from their guilt, and therefore ease them of their unrest, take that away. Here is that which will be a bed for your soul, even as it is a sweet savour of rest unto God Himself. For that is what the atonement is to God, a sweet savour of rest; and when Christ offered Himself to God, everything that was against the church in the heart of God and the law of God was taken away.

One more word - "I in them" in My visits. His visits He does adjourn, though that does not involve a separation between Him and His people. His visits are very much to be valued; might we have more of them. Can we join with Hart and say: "More frequent let Thy visits be, or let them longer last?" It is a great thing to be visited by Christ. A poor sinner brought to the obedience of faith and so keeping the word of Christ, pleading the atonement of Christ, and following hard after Him for a realization of an interest shall be visited by Christ, as He says: "If a man love Me, he will keep My word, and My father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him." Sometimes I have longed to enter into that: "We will make Our abode with him."

Now poor lover of Christ, you may think you do not keep His words; but if you are enabled to follow Him, to look to Him, to abide by His cross, to seek the visits of His face, the day will come when He will make that word good: "My Father will love him." That is, show He loves him, "and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him." You say, "Should I know if

He came to me?" Should you know? There is an instinct in the child of God, if I may use that word instinct here, of a spiritual nature, that in a remarkable way feels His approach. "The voice of my Beloved, behold He cometh." He is not yet come. No, He "cometh leaping upon the hills." What a wonderful thing! Leaping oï½er the mountains, skipping oï½er the hills to reach His poor people. That instinct in you will tell you that the Lord is approaching, but when He comes, shall you know it? He speaks, and we hear; He touches and we realize, we feel; He smiles and we melt; He sustains and He sets Himself before the eye of faith, and we admire and sit down and find His fruit sweet to our taste. Then dear friends, Christ and the soul are with each other. The influence of His love, the power of His grace, the presence of His divine Person in the glory of His love and goodness, the soul really enjoys, and to believe it is here, where one finds himself in union with the Apostle Pauli½s desire as expressed in the Philippians: "*I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, I forget the things which are behind, I reach forth unto those things which are before, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 3:13,12) That I begin to hope Christ has a great end to answer in apprehending me, calling me by His grace; not simply to give me a sense of safety and security from hell. There is that. Not simply to give me a good hope through grace, there is that. But to give me to enter somewhat into the mystery of divine wisdom and love in Christ, for which reason Christ has laid hold of me, that I, unworthy though I am, should be for the praise of His glory throughout eternity; that I should be part of His body, a member of His body in part. There is this great end, and Paul says, "*I seek that I may apprehend it.*" "I in them" in the visits of His face, in coming so to speak in His glorious Person to the eye of faith. He is apprehended, and faith brings Him in. Then it is as Paul speaks in the Colossians: "*Christ in you the hope of glory,*" (Col. 1:27) Yes, He is there. The soul feels Him. You say some of you, "We do not understand this." Well press on, beg and wait till the day comes when you will find the truth of Topladyi½s word: "One momenti½s intercourse with Him, my grief will overpay."

What liberty there is here, what sweet liberty, freed from sini½s condemnation, as Paul teaches in the Romans: "*If any man be in Christ he is a new creature;*" and again He says: "*There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.*" (Rom. 8:1) The union is then mutual. "*Ye are the branches, I am the vine, Ye are in Me, and I am in you. I am your Head, you are My members. I am your Lord, ye are all My servants, My people, and I delight in you.*" It is a sweetness even to long for this with a hope that one day it will come, but the experience of it is very remarkable. I wish it were known among us. It seems that we are in a dark day, and this is scarcely known. Though some know it, blessed, be God!

"I in them," and this is to be for ever. "*I have established My covenant with My chosen,*" says the Lord, "*for ever.*" His throne shall be established for ever, and His blessed covenant in the heart shall be for ever. The kingdom of God is within you. And you will never have the kingdom of God in you and always be destitute of the presence of the King. "Let my Beloved come into His garden, let Him come into the soul," for the garden there is the church, and the church is composed of poor sinners with whom the Lord is pleased to converse, and with whom He is pleased to condescend to walk.

I have named these few particulars. There are many, many more things that might be said about this vital and blessed subject, and if my hints should be the means of leading any of you to seek

God's face and seek His mercy in this particular that He would open to you the mystery of His presence and give you to experience it, and then ask that I might have the same, it will not have been in vain. May the Lord be with us.